

Message Text

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PAGE 01 CARACA 01927 182242Z

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 CIAE-00

PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01

SP-02 SS-15 SY-05 USSS-00 SCCT-01 OPR-02 CU-02 AID-05

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O P 182139Z FEB 76

FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2049

AMEMBASSY LIMA IMMEDIATE

INFO SECDEF PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY BOGOTA PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE PRIORITY

AMONSUL RIO DE JANEIRO PRIORITY 1283

C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 1927

LIMA FOR SECRETARY'S PARTY

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, VE, OVIP (KISSINGER, HENRY A.)

SUBJECT: CIVIL DISTURBANCES IN VENEZUELA ARE LARGELY UNRELATED
TO SECRETARY'S VISIT

REF: USDAO CARACAS 181500Z FEB 76 (IR 6 902 0029 76)

SUMMARY. STARTING TWO DAYS BEFORE THE SECRETARY'S VISIT
TO CARACAS AND CONTINUING AFTER HIS DEPARTURE, THERE HAS
BEEN A SERIES OF MINOR CIVIL DISTURBANCES IN VENEZUELA.
THESE HAVE BEEN LARGELY UNRELATED TO THE SECRETARY'S VISIT
ALTHOUGH SOME PRESS REPORTS TEND TO CONVEY THE OPPOSITE
IMPRESSION. END SUMMARY.

1. REPORTING BY CARACAS PRESS OF VARIOUS CIVIL DISORDERS

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 CARACA 01927 182242Z

IN VENEZUELA TENDS TO CREATE THE MISLEADING IMPRESSION

THAT THESE DISTURBANCES WERE CAUSED BY THE SECRETARY'S VISIT.

2. THE PRINCIPAL INCIDENTS WHICH HAVE RECEIVED PRESS ATTENTION ARE THE FOLLOWING:

A. ON FEBRUARY 14, THE POLICE KILLED TWO STUDENTS WHEN DEMONSTRATORS TRIED TO SEIZE THE ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES OF A PUBLIC SCHOOL IN SAN FELIPE, THE CAPITAL OF YARACUY STATE, LOCATED 180 MILES FROM CARACAS.

B. ON FEBRUARY 16, DISTURBANCES OCCURRED IN CARACAS AT CENTRAL UNIVERSITY, THE 23RD OF JANUARY BARRIO, AND THREE PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

C. BEFORE DAWN ON FEBRUARY 17, THREE PISTOL SHOTS WERE FIRED AT THE EMBASSY FROM A VOLKSWAGEN (CARACAS 1899).

D. ON FEBRUARY 17, THE NATIONAL GUARD KILLED A 15-YEAR OLD STUDENT IN THE 23RD JANUARY BARRIO AFTER YOUTHS ATTACKED A NATIONAL GUARD CAR WITH ROCKS.

E. A BRIEF DISTURBANCE AT PLAZA ALTAMIRA IN THE HEART OF CARACAS ON FEBRUARY 17.

F. BOMB EXPLODED IN SEARS STORE IN CARACAS ON FEBRUARY 17 CAUSING SOME DAMAGE BUT NO INJURIES.

G. ACCORDING TO AMCONSUL MARACAIBO, ON FEBRUARY 18, A GROUP OF ABOUT 100 STUDENTS DEMONSTRATED QUIETLY IN FRONT OF THE CONSULATE. AFTER ABOUT 30 MINUTES, POLICE DISPERSED THE GROUP.

2. ALTHOUGH SOME PRESS REPORTS HAVE CONVEYED THE IMPRESSION THAT THE DISTURBANCE AT CENTRAL UNIVERSITY INVOLVED LARGE NUMBERS OF STUDENTS, THE CHIEF OF THE CARACAS METROPOLITAN POLICE TOLD THE EMBASSY DEFENSE ATTACHE THAT THE NUMBERS WERE SMALL AND THE DISTURBANCE WAS "NOT SERIOUS." NATIONAL GUARD OFFICERS TOLD AN EMBASSY OFFICER THAT THIS DISTURBANCE LASTED ONLY TEN MINUTES.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 CARACA 01927 182242Z

3. TO PREVENT FURTHER OUTBREAKS, PRESIDENT PEREZ ANNOUNCED ON FEBRUARY 17 THAT THE POLICE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE STUDENT DEATH WOULD BE PUNISHED. PEREZ ATTRIBUTED THESE KILLINGS TO THE POOR STRUCTURE OF POLICE FORCES IN VENEZUELA AND MADE NO REFERENCE TO THE SECRETARY'S VISIT. ON FEBRUARY 18, THE GOV CLOSED ALL SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN CARACAS FOR SEVERAL DAYS.

4. COMMENT: THE CURRENT WAVE OF STUDENT DISORDERS STEMS FROM THE FEBRUARY 14 KILLING OF THE TWO STUDENTS IN SAN FELIPE. ACCORDING TO THE PRESS, OVERCROWDED SCHOOL CONDITIONS ALSO CONTRIBUTED TO THE DISURBANCES. THEY THUS COINCIDED WITH THE SECRETARY'S FEBRUARY 16-18 VISIT TO CARACAS, BUT WERE NOT TRIGGERED BY IT, ALTHOUGH AGITATORS WERE QUICK TO CAPITALIZE ON THE SECRETARY'S PRESENCE.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: MINISTERIAL VISITS, CIVIL DISORDERS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 18 FEB 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: buchant0
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976CARACA01927
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760061-0177
From: CARACAS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760241/aaaabjga.tel
Line Count: 125
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: buchant0
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 14 JUL 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <14 JUL 2004 by SmithRJ>; APPROVED <21 OCT 2004 by buchant0>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: CIVIL DISTURBANCES IN VENEZUELA ARE LARGELY UNRELATED TO SECRETARY'S VISIT
TAGS: PFOR, OVIP, PINS, VE, US, (KISSINGER, HENRY A)
To: STATE LIMA
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006